Telephone interview with CDR William J. Jasper, DC, USN (Ret.), dental officer aboard USS *Antietam* (CV-36) in Korea. Conducted by Jan K. Herman, Historian, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, 17 September 2002.

What was your impression of the *Antietam* when you first reported?

It was awfully big. It was the first ship I had served on and I was very excited following a long transcontinental rail trip from home (Pittsburgh) to San Diego. I went aboard in either late spring or early summer of 1951.

These were my ancillary duties while attached to the ship in 1951 and '52. My duties, in addition to being dental officer, was officer in charge of my general quarters station. It was an auxiliary battle station on the second level, the so-called gallery deck just below the flight deck. We had ready access not only to the flight deck but also to staterooms for senior officers and some air-conditioned ready rooms.

The dental division, by its very nature, is the smallest division aboard ship. There were just 3 officers and 3 or 4 dental technicians and that was it. I was the division training officer. My other official duty included being a member of a board concerned with the inventory of alcohol and narcotics.

Could you describe the dental department aboard the *Antietam*?

When you go aboard the new aircraft carriers, the dental departments occupy very ample spaces. They have full laboratory facilities. We had none. We had one large room partitioned into sections. We had three dental chairs welded to the deck. There was one funny incident I must tell you. At one time, the ship made a sharp turn. The dental space had an overboard discharge. It was a 6 to 8-inch circular hole directly in front of my dental chair. Through it normally poured fresh air. I had left it open. Suddenly in came a mass of seawater directly on both me and the patient. Immediately I dogged the open hatch, but the memory of the incident remains.

We had three dental officers and--as I said--no lab facilities. If there was a patient requiring prosthetics, that person was referred to a larger dental clinic with prosthetics capability. There may have been some incidents where by high-line we may have had to transfer a patient off the ship--and of course there were replenishments periodically. Normally, there were no interruptions of air operations.

Also, I was the Jewish lay leader. I accumulated religious supplies including sacramental wine and candles prior to departing the U.S. and Hawaii for WESTPAC. The sources of those supplies was either the Jewish Welfare Board in San Francisco and the Navy Chaplain's office in Hawaii. At that time I think the Jewish chaplain was LT Samuel Sobel, ChC, USN. (Chaplain Sobel is retired and lives in Norfolk, VA.) I also received, at my request, boxes of supplies from the Union of American Hebrew Congregations headquartered in New York. I knew the executive director, Rabbi Louis Egelson--a friend of my congregation's rabbi, Dr. Solomon B. Freehof. Rabbi Egelson was helpful and very supportive.

Flight operations permitting, I conducted Friday evening services in the ship's library. Depending where the ship was operating, and its schedule, we observed as many of the Jewish holidays as possible. This is the picture that you saw when you looked at the *Antietam*'s Korean War cruise book.

When we initially arrived in Japan, there wasn't a Jewish chaplain at Yokosuka. I coordinated with the base chaplain's office and arranged for Jewish personnel, particularly during the Holy Days, to worship with the Yokohama Jewish community in their chapel.

The people who attended those services were primarily Army and some dependents. There were also civilians. This was the first time in my life that I had ever heard Russian spoken by very well dressed ex-Russians who were living in Japan.

Were these White Russians?

Yes. As you know, Russia was our arch enemy. The very helpful COMNAVFE (Commander, Naval Forces Far East) Jewish chaplain was Rabbi (LTJG) Arnold Wolf. If he's still living, he would be the senior rabbi at the Kehillath Anshe Maariv (KAM) congregation in Chicago.

We only had one ship's chaplain, a Catholic priest, Father Paul Pieri (LCDR, ChC, USNR) who has since passed on. He encouraged me, especially on Friday nights when there were no air operations at sea, to offer the evening prayer at "Lights Out" over the ship's 1MC, the loud speaker system. I don't know whether that was unique, but it was very much appreciated.

During a scheduled while en route to the Hakone Park, a famous mountainous recreation area east of Tokyo, I met a Japanese dental student, Joseph Koike. He invited me to tour his school--the Tokyo Medical-Dental College--during the *Antietam*'s next trip to Yokosuka. This friendship has lasted over 50 years.

Later, in December 1960, when my family and I were en route to Taipei, Taiwan, aboard USS *General William Mitchell* (AP-114), Dr. Koike brought his wife and children from Tokyo to meet us at the ship. We toured the ship (including the dental and medical spaces) and had lunch aboard.

Going back to your role as Jewish lay leader aboard the ship. . . Did you volunteer for that duty or did the chaplain select you?

It was all volunteer. By the way, I'm just reading a book entitled *The Fighting Rabbis* by Chaplain Albert Isaac Slomovitz, ChC, USN. He wrote that these lay leaders who offered this assistance were not selected by a senior officer or by a chaplain; they were all volunteers--both officers and enlisted personnel. I always performed that function strictly as a volunteer wherever I was stationed, ashore or afloat.

Let's say during Passover season, you would have organized the Seder and had volunteers help you from the crew?

I really don't recall holding a Seder aboard the *Antietam* but I conducted a Seder aboard the *Forrestal* in 1957 while in the Mediterranean Sea, and I have pictures as proof. The admiral's chief of staff joined with the Jewish personnel. Fifty or sixty crew members attended. Everything for the Seder was shipped to us by the Jewish Welfare Board. It was held in one of the officers' dining spaces.

Did you ever require supplies out at sea that you didn't have?

Prior to joining the Task Force 77 in the Sea of Japan, it was my professional opinion that we needed a certain type of desensitizing paste (for use on hypersensitive and exposed dentin) not available through the normal supply channels. I sought out on the Japanese naval base their

chemistry lab. Even though there was a language problem, they helped me obtain and prepare sufficient quantities of this topical paste for the entire fleet. It was, basically, a sodium fluoride paste.

For me, the most memorable event that happened out there at that time was a shipboard project conceived and conducted by the crew. During that 6-month cruise, the *Antietam* raised over $15,000 for the Shrine's Crippled Children's Hospitals. At that time, that was the largest amount of money ever raised--voluntarily--by a ship for a charity.

The story of this effort is the subject of an essay I wrote last year entitled, "A Man Never Stands So Tall." The essay shared second prize in the inspirational section of an essay contest conducted by the Navy Chaplain Foundation. When I accepted the check, the essay became the sole property of the Foundation. That's why I cannot send you a copy of the essay. It recounts the entire story of how an idea became a reality--all done by the crew with the captain's (RADM George Dufek, USN (Ret.)--deceased--full approval and support.

What was the total amount raised?

We raised over $15,000 dollars, which in 1952 was a lot of money for a ship returning from the forward area. There was another dental officer involved, CDR Max Brandt, DC, USN, the senior dental officer (deceased).

When you reported to the ship you said you had never seen anything as big as an aircraft carrier. What season was it when you arrived off the coast of Korea?

We arrived in the forward area in late fall, and were there until the following spring. It was a cold winter. Books have been written about how cold that winter was. We left in March, arriving in San Francisco on the 1st of May.

What was the ship's main job?

Interdiction: blowing up rail lines and supply trucks heading south to supply the communist troops.

Could you describe the condition of the carrier's flight deck in the dead of winter?

One or two of the flight deck crew literally walked off the ship into the sea. They couldn't tell the difference between the ship and the sea. We lost very flew pilots. That low number was a real credit to everybody involved. In contrast, the *Valley Forge* lost a large number of pilots--in both combat and non-combat operations..

Did you ever participate or are you aware of rescuing any pilots who may have had to ditch or bail out over the ocean?

No. I only knew about pilots who had disabled planes and had to ditch and were rescued.

You also had a helicopter rescue team that was already ready to go out.

Yes. I remember one incident. We had a Jewish pilot, LT Aaron Modansky, USNR, from New York. He flew in the Panther jet. Aaron was catapulted and had a flameout. The plane went into the sea. It was cold. Miraculously he was able to extricate himself from the plane and swim to the surface. He was then picked up by one of our "angels," which were always in operation when we had air operations.

Were there any special provisions in sick bay that you remember that were used to deal with people who may have had hypothermia?

It's quite possible but I have no recollection. The air group had its own physician, LT Wayne Erdbrink.

It's own flight surgeon attached to the air group?

That's right. The flight surgeon is still living. I remember one incident regarding Dr. Erdbrink, the air group's flight surgeon. At the landing of an aircraft, one of the plane's guns discharged. The shell went through the flight surgeon's compartment. It so happened that he had bent over, and the shell's trajectory passed where his head and shoulders were just a moment before. That was a close call!

Well, Dr. Jasper, you've answered all my questions and more. Thank you.